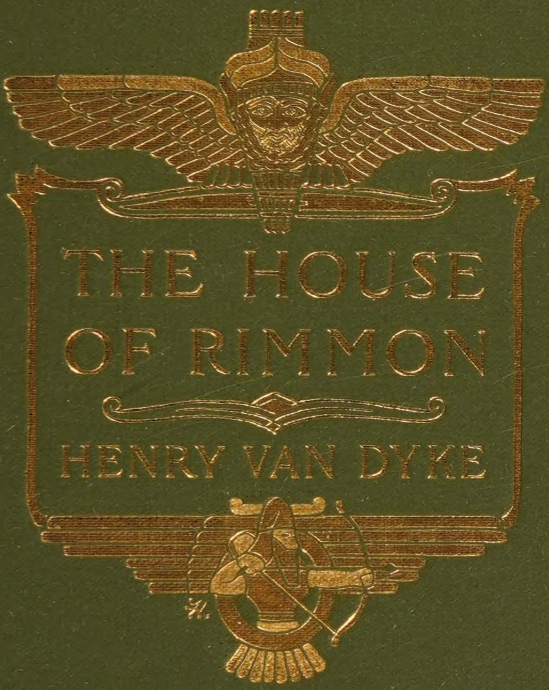
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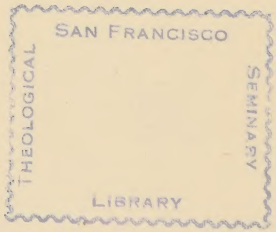
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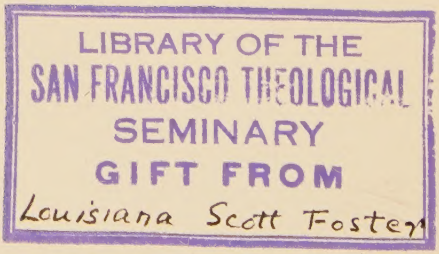
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THE HOUSE OF RIMMON

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THE HOUSE OF RIMMON

A DRAMA IN FOUR ACTS

BY

HENRY VAN DYKE

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NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
1908

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Published in October

THE HOUSE OF RIMMON

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

BENHADAD: King of Damascus.

REZON: High Priest of the House of Rimmon.

SABALLIDIN: A Noble of Damascus.

HAZAEL, IZDUBHAR, RAKHAZ } Courtiers of Damascus.

SHUMAKIM: The King's Fool.

ELISHA: Prophet of Israel.

NAAMAN: Captain of the Armies of Damascus.

RUAHMAH: A Captive Maid of Israel.

TSARPI: Wife to Naaman.

KHAMMA, NUBTA } Attendants of Tsarpi.

Soldiers, Servants, Citizens, etc., etc.

SCENE: *Damascus and the Mountains of Samaria.*

TIME: 850 *B. C.*

ACT I

ACT I

Scene I

Night, in the garden of Naaman *at Damascus. At the left, on a slightly raised terrace, the palace, with softly gleaming lights and music coming from the open latticed windows. The garden is full of oleanders, roses, pomegranates, abundance of crimson flowers; the air is heavy with their fragrance: a fountain at the right is plashing gently: behind it is an arbour covered with vines. Near the centre of the garden stands a small, hideous image of the god Rimmon. Back of the arbour rises the lofty square tower of the House of Rimmon, which casts a shadow from the moon across the garden. The background is a wide, hilly landscape, with a high road passing over the mountains toward the snow-clad summits of Mount Hermon in the distance. Enter by the palace door, the lady* Tsarpi, *robed in red and gold, and followed by her maids,* Khamma *and* Nubta. *She remains on the terrace: they go down into the garden, looking about, and returning to her.*

Khamma:

There's no one here; the garden is asleep.

Nubta:

The flowers are nodding, all the birds abed,

And nothing wakes except the watchful stars!

KHAMMA:

The stars are sentinels discreet and mute:

How many things they know and never tell!

TSARPI: [*Impatiently.*]

Unlike the stars, how many things you tell

And do not know! When comes your master home?

NUBTA:

Lady, his armour-bearer brought us word

An hour ago, the master will be here

At moonset, not before.

TSARPI:

He haunts the camp

And leaves me much alone; yet I can pass

The time of absence not unhappily,

If I but know the time of his return.

An hour of moonlight yet! Khamma, my mirror!

These curls are ill arranged, this veil too low,—

So,—that is better, careless maids! Withdraw,—

But warn me if your master should appear.

KHAMMA:

Mistress, have no concern; for when we hear
The clatter of his horse along the street,
We'll run this way and lead your dancers down
With song and laughter,—you shall know in time.

[*Exeunt* KHAMMA *and* NUBTA, *laughing.*
TSARPI *descends the steps.*]

TSARPI:

My guest is late; but he will surely come!
Hunger and thirst will bring him to my feet.
The man who burns to drain the cup of love,—
The priest whose greed of glory never fails,—
Both, both have need of me, and he will come.
And I,—what do I need? Why everything
That helps my beauty to a higher throne;
All that a priest can promise, all a man
Can give, and all a god bestow, I need:
This may a woman win, and this will I.

[*Enter* Rezon *quietly from the shadow of the trees. He stands behind* Tsarpi *and listens, smiling, to her last words. Then he drops his mantle of leopard-skin, and lifts his high-priest's rod of bronze, shaped at one end like a star, at the other like a thunderbolt.*]

Rezon:

Tsarpi!

Tsarpi:

The mistress of the house of Naaman

Salutes the keeper of the House of Rimmon.

[*She bows low before him.*]

Rezon:

Rimmon receives you with his star of peace;

[*He lowers the star-point of the rod, which glows for a moment with rosy light above her head.*]

And I, his chosen minister, kneel down

Before your regal beauty, and implore

The welcome of the woman for the man.

TSARPI: [*Giving him her hand, but holding off his embrace.*]

Thus Tsarpi welcomes Rezon! Nay, no more!
Till I have heard what errand brings you here
By night, within the garden of the man
Who hates you most and fears you least in all
Damascus.

REZON: [*Rising, and speaking angrily.*]

Trust me, I repay his scorn
With double hatred,—Naaman, the man
Whom the King honours and the people love,
Who stands against the nobles and the priests,
Against the oracles of Rimmon's House,
And cries, "We'll fight to keep Damascus free!"
This powerful fool, this impious devotee
Of liberty, who loves the city more
Than he reveres the city's ancient god:
This frigid husband who sets you below

His dream of duty to a horde of slaves:

This man I hate, and I will humble him.

Tsarpi:

I think I hate him too. He stands apart

From me, ev'n while he holds me in his arms,

By something that I cannot understand,

Nor supple to my will, nor melt with tears,

Nor quite dissolve with blandishments, although

He swears he loves his wife next to his honour!

Next? That's too low! I will be first or nothing.

Rezon:

With me you are the first, the absolute!

When you and I have triumphed you shall reign;

And you and I will bring this hero down.

Tsarpi:

But how? For he is strong.

Rezon:

By these, the eyes

Of Tsarpi; and by this, the rod of Rimmon.

Tsarpi:

Speak clearly; tell your plan.

Rezon:

You know the host
Of the Assyrian king has broken forth
Again to conquer us. Envoys have come
From Shalmaneser to demand surrender.
Our king Benhadad wavers, for he knows
His weakness. All the nobles, all the rich,
Would purchase peace that they may grow more rich:
Only the people and the soldiers, led
By Naaman, would fight for liberty.
Blind fools! To-day the envoys came to pay
Their worship to our god, whom they adore
In Nineveh as Asshur's brother-god.
They talked with me in secret. Promises,
Great promises! For every noble house

That urges peace, a noble recompense:
The king, submissive, kept in royal state
And splendour: most of all, honour and wealth
Shall crown the House of Rimmon, and his priest,—
Yea, and his priestess. For we two will rise
Upon the city's fall. The common folk
Shall suffer; Naaman shall sink with them
In wreck; but I shall rise, and you shall rise
Above me! You shall climb, through incense-smoke,
And days of pomp, and nights of revelry,
Glorious rites and ecstasies of love,
Unto the topmost room in Rimmon's tower,
The secret, lofty room, the couch of bliss,
And the divine embraces of the god.

Tsarpi: [*Throwing out her arms in exultation.*]

All, all I wish! What must I do for this?

Rezon:

Turn Naaman away from thoughts of war;

Or purchase him with love's delights to yield
This point,—I care not how,—and afterwards
The future shall be ours.

TSARPI:

And if I fail?

REZON:

I have another shaft. The last appeal,
Before the king decides, is to the oracle
Of Rimmon. You shall read the signs!
A former priestess of his temple, you
Shall be the interpreter of heaven, and speak
A word to melt this brazen soldier's heart
Within his breast.

TSARPI:

But if it flame instead?

REZON:

I know the way to quench that flame. The cup,
The parting cup your hand shall give to him!
What if the curse of Rimmon should infect

That wine with sacred venom, secretly
To work within his veins, week after week
Corrupting all the currents of his blood,
Dimming his eyes, wasting his flesh? What then?
Would he prevail in war? Would he come back
To glory, or to shame? What think you?

TSARPI:

I?

I do not think; I only do my part.
But can the gods bless this?

REZON:

The gods can bless
Whatever they decree; their will makes right;
And this is for the glory of the house
Of Rimmon,—and for thee, my queen. Come, come!
The night grows dark: we'll perfect our alliance.

[REZON *draws her with him, embracing her, through the shadows of the garden.* RUAHMAH,

who has been sleeping in the arbour, has been awakened during the dialogue, and has been dimly visible in her white dress, behind the vines. She parts them and comes out, pushing back her long, dark hair from her temples.]

RUAHMAH:

What have I heard? O God, what shame is this
Plotted beneath Thy pure and silent stars!
Was it for this that I was brought away
Captive from Israel's blessed hills to serve
A heathen mistress in a land of lies?
Ah, treacherous, shameful priest! Ah, shameless wife
Of one too noble to suspect thy guilt!
The very greatness of his generous heart
Betrays him to their hands. What can I do?
Nothing,—a slave,—hated and mocked by all
My fellow-slaves! O bitter prison-life!
I smother in this black, betraying air

Of lust and luxury; I faint beneath

The shadow of this House of Rimmon. God

Have mercy! Lead me out to Israel.

To Israel!

[*Music and laughter heard within the palace. The doors fly open and a flood of men and women, dancers, players, flushed with wine, dishevelled, pour down the steps,* Khamma *and* Nubta *with them. They crown the image with roses and dance around it.* Ruahmah *is discovered crouching beside the arbour. They drag her out before the image.*]

Nubta:

Look! Here's the Hebrew maid,—

She's homesick; let us comfort her!

Khamma: [*They put their arms around her.*]

Yes, dancing is the cure for homesickness.

We'll make her dance.

Ruahmah: [*She slips away.*]

I pray you, let me go!

I cannot dance, I do not know your measures.

KHAMMA:

Then sing for us,—a song of Israel!

RUAHMAH:

How can I sing the songs of Israel

In this strange country? O my heart would break

With grief in every note of that dear music.

A SERVANT:

A stubborn and unfriendly maid! We'll whip her.

[*They circle around her, striking her with rose-branches; she sinks to her knees, covering her face with her bare arms, which bleed.*]

NUBTA:

Look, look! She kneels to Rimmon, she is tamed.

RUAHMAH: [*Springing up and lifting her arms.*]

Nay, not to this dumb idol, but to Him

Who made Orion and the seven stars!

ALL:

She raves,—she mocks at Rimmon! Punish her!

The fountain! Wash her blasphemy away!

[*They push her toward the fountain, laughing and shouting. In the open door of the palace*

NAAMAN *appears, dressed in blue and silver, bareheaded and unarmed. He comes to the top of the steps and stands for a moment, astonished and angry.*]

NAAMAN:

Silence! What drunken rout is this? Begone,

Ye barking dogs and mewing cats! Out, all!

Poor child, what have they done to thee?

[*Exeunt all except* RUAHMAH, *who stands with her face covered by her hands.* NAAMAN *comes to her, laying his hand on her shoulder.*]

RUAHMAH: [*Looking up in his face.*]

Nothing,

My lord and master! They have harmed me not.

NAAMAN: [*Touching her arm.*]

Dost call this nothing?

RUAHMAH:

Since my lord is come.

NAAMAN:

I do not know thy face,—who art thou, child?

RUAHMAH:

The handmaid of thy wife. These three years past
I have attended her.

NAAMAN:

Whence comest thou?
Thy voice is like thy mistress, but thy looks
Have something foreign. Tell thy name, thy land.

RUAHMAH:

Ruahmah is my name, a captive maid,
The daughter of a prince in Israel,—
Where once, in olden days, I saw my lord
Ride through our highlands, when Samaria
Was allied with Damascus to defeat
Asshur, our common foe.

NAAMAN:

O glorious days,
Crowded with life! And thou rememberest them?

RUAHMAH:

As clear as yesterday! Master, I saw
Thee riding on a snow-white horse beside

Our king; and all we joyful little maids
Strewed boughs of palm along the victors' way;
For you had driven out the enemy,
Broken; and both our lands were friends and free.

NAAMAN: [*Sadly.*]

Well, they are past, those noble days! The friends
That fought for freedom stand apart, rivals
For Asshur's favour, like two jealous dogs
That snarl and bite each other, while they wait
The master's whip, enforcing peace. The days
When nations would imperil all to keep
Their liberties, are only memories now.
The common cause is lost,—and thou art brought,
The captive of some mercenary raid,
Some profitable, honourless foray,
To serve within my house. Dost thou fare well?

RUAHMAH:

Master, thou seest.

NAAMAN:

Yes, I see! My child,

Why do they hate thee so?

RUAHMAH:

I do not know,

Unless because I will not bow to Rimmon.

NAAMAN:

Thou needest not. I fear he is a god

Who pities not his people, will not save.

My heart is sick with doubt of him. But thou

Shalt hold thy faith,—I care not what it is,—

Worship thy god; but keep thy spirit free.

Here, take this chain and wear it with my seal,

None shall molest the maid who carries this.

Thou hast found favour in thy master's eyes;

Hast thou no other gift to ask of me?

RUAHMAH: [*Earnestly.*]

My lord, I do entreat thee not to go

To-morrow to the council. Seek the King

And speak with him in secret; but avoid
The audience-hall.

NAAMAN:

Why, what is this? Thy wits
Are wandering. Why dost thou ask this thing
Impossible! My honour is engaged
To speak for war, to lead in war against
The Assyrian Bull and save Damascus.

RUAHMAH: [*With confused earnestness.*]

Then, lord, if thou must go, I pray thee speak,—
I know not how,—but so that all must hear.
With magic of unanswerable words
Persuade thy foes. Yet watch,—beware,—

NAAMAN:

Of what?

RUAHMAH: [*Turning aside.*]

I am entangled in my speech,—no light,—
How shall I tell him? He will not believe.
O my dear lord, thine enemies are they

Of thine own house. I pray thee to beware,—

Beware,—of Rimmon!

NAAMAN:

Child, thy words are wild;

Thy troubles have bewildered all thy brain.

Go, now, and fret no more; but sleep, and dream

Of Israel! For thou shalt see thy home

Among the hills again.

RUAHMAH:

Master, good-night.

And may thy slumber be as sweet and deep

As if thou camped at snowy Hermon's foot,

Amid the music of his waterfalls

And watched by winged sentries of the sky.

There friendly oak-trees bend their boughs above

The weary head, pillowed on earth's kind breast,

And unpolluted breezes lightly breathe

A song of sleep among the murmuring leaves.

There the big stars draw nearer, and the sun

Looks forth serene, undimmed by city's mirk
Or smoke of idol-temples, to behold
The waking wonder of the wide-spread world,
And life renews itself with every morn
In purest joy of living. May the Lord
Deliver thee, dear master, from the nets
Laid for thy feet, and lead thee out, along
The open path, beneath the open sky!
Thou shalt be followed always by the heart
Of one poor captive maid who prays for thee.

[*Exit* Ruahmah: Naaman *stands looking after her.*]

Scene II.

Time: *The following morning.*

The audience-hall in Benhadad's *palace. The sides of the hall are lined with lofty columns: the back opens toward the city, with descending steps: the House of Rimmon with its high tower is seen in the background. The throne is at the right in front: opposite is the royal door of entrance, guarded by four tall sentinels. Enter at the rear between the columns,* Rakhaz, Saballidin, Hazael, Izdubhar.

Izdubhar: [*An excited old man.*]

The city is all in a turmoil. It boils like a pot of lentils. The people are foaming and bubbling round and round like beans in the pottage.

Hazael: [*A lean, crafty man.*]

Fear is a hot fire.

Rakhaz: [*A fat, pompous man.*]

Well may they fear, for the Assyrians are not three days distant. They are blazing along like a waterspout to chop Damascus down like a pitcher of spilt milk.

Saballidin: [*Young and frank.*]

Cannot Naaman drive them back?

Rakhaz: [*Puffing and blowing.*]

Ho! Naaman? Where have you been living? Naaman is a broken reed whose claws have been cut. Build no hopes on that foundation, for it will upset in the midst of the sea and leave you hanging in the air.

Saballidin:

He clatters like a windmill. What would he say, Hazael?

Hazael:

Naaman can do nothing without the command of the King; and the King fears to order the army to march without the approval of the gods. The High Priest is against it. The House of Rimmon is for peace with Asshur.

Rakhaz:

Yes, and all the nobles are for peace. We are

the men whose wisdom lights the rudder that upholds the chariot of state. Would we be rich if we were not wise? Do we not know better than the rabble what medicine will silence this fire that threatens to drown us?

IZDUBHAR:

But if the Assyrians come, we shall all perish; they will despoil us all.

HAZAEL:

Not us, my lord, only the common people. The envoys have offered favourable terms to the priests, and the nobles, and the King. No palace, no temple, shall be plundered. Only the shops, and the markets, and the houses of the multitude shall be given up to the Bull. He will eat his supper from the pot of lentils, not from our golden plate.

RAKHAZ:

Yes, and all who speak for peace in the council shall be enriched; our heads shall be crowned with

seats of honour in the processions of the Assyrian king. He needs wise counsellors to help him guide the ship of empire onto the solid rock of prosperity. You must be with us, my lords Izdubhar and Saballidin, and let the stars of your wisdom roar loudly for peace.

Izdubhar:

He talks like a tablet read upside down,—a wild ass braying in the wilderness. Yet there is policy in his words.

Saballidin:

I know not. Can a kingdom live without a people or an army? If we let the Bull in to sup on the lentils, will he not make his breakfast in our vineyards?

[*Enter other courtiers following* Shumakim, *a crooked little jester, in blue, green and red, a wreath of poppies around his neck and a flagon in his hand. He walks unsteadily, and stutters in his speech.*]

Hazael:

Here is Shumakim, the King's fool, with his legs full of last night's wine.

Shumakim: [*Balancing himself in front of them and chuckling.*]

Wrong, my lords, very wrong! This is not last night's wine, but a draught the King's physician gave me this morning for a cure. It sobers me amazingly! I know you all, my lords: any fool would know you. You, master, are a statesman; and you are a politician; and you are a patriot.

Rakhaz:

Am I a statesman? I felt something of the kind about me. But what is a statesman?

Shumakim:

A politician that is stuffed with big words; a fat man in a mask; one that plays a solemn tune on a sackbut full o' wind.

Hazael:

And what is a politician?

Shumakim:

A statesman that has dropped his mask and cracked his sackbut. Men trust him for what he is, and he never deceives them, because he always lies.

Izdubhar:

Why do you call me a patriot?

Shumakim:

Because you know what is good for you; you love your country as you love your pelf. You feel for the common people,—as the wolf feels for the sheep.

Saballidin:

And what am I?

Shumakim:

A fool, master, just a plain fool; and there is hope of thee for that reason. Embrace me, brother, and taste this; but not too much,—it will intoxicate thee with sobriety.

[*The hall has been slowly filling with courtiers and soldiers: a crowd of people begin to come*

up the steps at the rear, where they are halted by a chain guarded by servants of the palace. A bell tolls; the royal door is thrown open; the aged King crosses the hall slowly and takes his seat on the throne with the four tall sentinels standing behind him. All bow down shading their eyes with their hands.]

BENHADAD:

The hour of royal audience is come.

I'll hear the envoys of my brother king,

The son of Asshur. Are my counsellors

At hand? Where are the priests of Rimmon's House?

[*Gongs sound.* REZON *comes in from the rear, followed by a procession of priests in black and yellow. The courtiers bow; the King rises;* REZON *takes his stand on the steps of the throne at the left of the King.*]

BENHADAD:

Where is my faithful servant Naaman,

The captain of my host?

[*Trumpets sound from the city. The crowd on the steps divide; the chain is lowered;* Naaman *enters, followed by six soldiers. He is dressed in chain-mail, with a silver helmet and a cloak of blue. He uncovers, and kneels on the steps of the throne at the King's right.*]

Naaman:

My lord the King,

The bearer of thy sword is here.

Benhadad: [*Giving* Naaman *his hand, and sitting down.*]

Welcome,

My strong right arm that never failed me yet!

I am in doubt,—but stay thou close to me

While I decide this cause. Where are the envoys?

Let them appear and give their message.

[*Enter the Assyrian envoys; one in white and the other in red; both with the golden Bull's head embroidered on their robes. They come from the right, rear, bow slightly before the throne, and take the centre of the hall.*]

WHITE ENVOY: [*Stepping forward.*]

Greeting from Shalmaneser, Asshur's son,

The king who reigns at Nineveh

And takes his tribute from a thousand cities,

Unto Benhadad, monarch in Damascus!

The conquering Bull has come out of the north;

The south has fallen before him, and the west

His feet have trodden; Hamath is laid waste;

He pauses at your gate, invincible,—

To offer peace. The princes of your court,

The priests of Rimmon's house, and you, the King,

If you pay homage to your overlord,

Shall rest secure, and flourish as our friends.

Assyria sends to you this gilded yoke;

Receive it as the sign of proffered peace.

[*He lays a yoke on the steps of the throne.*]

BENHADAD:

What of the city? Said your king no word

Of our Damascus, and the many folk

That do inhabit her and make her great?

What of the soldiers who have fought for us?

The people who have sheltered 'neath our shield?

White Envoy:

Of these my royal master did not speak.

Benhadad:

Strange silence! Must we give them up to him?

Is this the price at which he offers us

The yoke of peace? What if we do refuse?

Red Envoy: [*Stepping forward.*]

Then ruthless war! War to the uttermost.

No quarter, no compassion, no escape!

The Bull will gore and trample in his fury

Nobles and priests and king,—none shall be spared!

Before the throne we lay our second gift;

This bloody horn, the symbol of red war.

[*He lays a long bull's horn, stained with blood on the steps of the throne.*]

White Envoy:

Our message is delivered. Grant us leave

And safe conveyance, that we may return

Unto our master. He will wait three days

To know your royal choice between his gifts.

Keep which you will and send the other back;

The red bull's horn your youngest page may bring;

But with the yoke, best send your mightiest army!

[*The* Envoys *retire, amid confused murmurs of the people, the King silent, his head sunken on his breast.*]

Benhadad:

Proud words, a bitter message, hard to endure!

We are not now that force which feared no foe:

Our host is weakened, and our old allies

Have left us. Can we face this raging Bull

Alone, and beat him back? Give me your counsel.

[*Many speak at once, confusedly.*]

What babblement is this? Were ye born at Babel?

Give me clear words and reasonable speech.

Rakhaz: [*Pompously.*]

O King, I am a reasonable man;

And there be some who call me very wise
And prudent; but of this I will not speak,
For I am also modest. Let me plead,
Persuade, and reason you to choose for peace.
This golden yoke may be a bitter draught,
But better far to fold it in our arms,
Than risk our cargoes in the savage horn
Of war. Shall we imperil all our wealth,
Our valuable lives? Nobles are few,
Rich men are rare, and wise men rarer still;
The precious jewels on the tree of life,
Wherein the common people are but bricks
And clay and rubble. Let the city go,
But save the corner-stones that float the ship!
Have I not spoken well?

Benhadad: [*Shaking his head.*]
Excellent well!
Most eloquent! But misty in the meaning.

HAZAEL: [*With cold decision.*]

Then let me speak, O King, in plainer words!

The days of independent states are past:

The tide of empire sweeps across the earth;

Assyria rides it with resistless power

And thunders on to subjugate the world.

Oppose her, and we fight with Destiny;

Submit to her demands, and we shall ride

With her to victory. Therefore return

This bloody horn, the symbol of wild war,

With words of soft refusal, and accept

The golden yoke, Assyria's gift of peace.

NAAMAN: [*Starting forward eagerly.*]

There is no peace beneath a conqueror's yoke,

My King, but shame and heaviness of heart!

For every state that barters liberty

To win imperial favour, shall be drained

Of her best blood, henceforth, in endless wars

To make the empire greater. Here's the choice:
We fight to-day to keep our country free,
Or else we fight forevermore to help
Assyria bind the world as we are bound.
I am a soldier, and I know the hell
Of war! But I will gladly ride through hell
To save Damascus. Master, bid me ride!
Ten thousand chariots wait for your command;
And twenty thousand horsemen strain the leash
Of patience till you let them go; a throng
Of spearmen, archers, swordsmen, like the sea
Chafing against a dike, roar for the onset!
O master, let me launch your mighty host
Against the Bull,—we'll bring him to his knees!

[*Cries of "War!" from the soldiers and the people; "peace!" from the courtiers and the priests. The King rises, turning toward* Naaman, *and seems about to speak.* Rezon *lifts his rod.*]

Rezon:

Shall not the gods decide when mortals doubt?

Rimmon is master of the city's fate;

He reigns in secret and his will is law;

We read his will, by our most ancient faith,

In omens and in signs of mystery.

Must we not hearken to his high commands?

Benhadad: [*Sinking back on the throne, submissively.*]

I am the faithful son of Rimmon's House.

Consult the oracle. But who shall read?

Rezon:

Tsarpi, the wife of Naaman, who served

Within the temple in her maiden years,

Shall be the mouthpiece of the mighty god,

To-day's high-priestess. Bring the sacrifice!

[*Gongs and cymbals sound: enter priests carrying an altar on which a lamb is bound. The altar is placed in the centre of the hall.* Tsarpi *follows the priests, covered with a long transparent veil of black, sewn with gold stars;*

RUAHMAH, *in white, bears her train.* TSARPI *stands before the altar, facing it, and lifts her right hand holding a knife.* RUAHMAH *steps back, near the throne, her hands crossed on her breast, her head bowed. The priests close in around* TSARPI *and the altar. The knife is seen to strike downward. Gongs and cymbals sound: cries of "Rimmon, hear us!" The circle of priests opens, and* TSARPI *turns slowly to face the King.*]

TSARPI: [*Monotonously.*]

Black is the blood of the victim,

Rimmon is unfavourable,

Asratu is unfavourable;

They will not war against Asshur,

They will make a league with the God of Nineveh.

Evil is in store for Damascus,

A strong enemy will lay waste the land.

Therefore make peace with the Bull;

Hearken to the voice of Rimmon.

[*She turns again to the altar, and the priests close in around her.* Rezon *lifts his rod toward the tower of the temple. A flash of lightning followed by thunder; smoke rises from the altar; all except* Naaman *and* Ruah-mah *cover their faces. The circle of priests opens again, and* Tsarpi *comes forward slowly, chanting.*]

Chant:

Hear the words of Rimmon! Thus your Maker speaketh:

I, the god of thunder, riding on the whirlwind,

I, the god of lightning leaping from the storm-cloud,

I will smite with vengeance him who dares defy me!

He who leads Damascus into war with Asshur,

Conquering or conquered, bears my curse upon him.

Surely shall my arrow strike his heart in secret,

Burn his flesh with fever, turn his blood to poison,

Brand him with corruption, drive him into darkness;

He alone shall perish, by the doom of Rimmon.

[*All are terrified and look toward* Naaman, *shuddering.* Ruahmah *alone seems not to heed the curse, but stands with her eyes fixed on* Naaman.]

Ruahmah:

Be not afraid! There is a greater God

Shall cover thee with His almighty wings:

Beneath his shield and buckler shalt thou trust.

Benhadad:

Repent, my son, thou must not brave this curse.

Naaman:

My King, there is no curse as terrible

As that which lights a bosom-fire for him

Who gives away his honour, to prolong

A craven life whose every breath is shame!

If I betray the men who follow me,

The city that has put her trust in me,

The country to whose service I am bound,

What king can shield me from my own deep scorn,

What god release me from that self-made hell?

The tender mercies of Assyria
I know; and they are cruel as creeping tigers.
Give up Damascus, and her streets will run
Rivers of innocent blood; the city's heart,
That mighty, labouring heart, wounded and crushed
Beneath the brutal hooves of the wild Bull,
Will cry against her captain, sitting safe
Among the nobles, in some pleasant place.
I shall be safe,—safe from the threatened wrath
Of unknown gods, but damned forever by
The men I know,—that is the curse I fear.

BENHADAD:

Speak not so high, my son. Must we not bow
Our heads before the sovereignties of heaven?
The unseen rulers are Divine.

NAAMAN:

O King,
I am unlearned in the lore of priests;
Yet well I know that there are hidden powers

About us, working mortal weal and woe
Beyond the force of mortal to control.
And if these powers appear in love and truth,
I think they must be gods, and worship them.
But if their secret will is manifest
In blind decrees of sheer omnipotence,
That punish where no fault is found, and smite
The poor with undeserved calamity,
And pierce the undefended in the dark
With arrows of injustice, and foredoom
The innocent to burn in endless pain,
I will not call this fierce almightiness
Divine. Though I must bear, with every man,
The burden of my life ordained, I'll keep
My soul unterrified, and tread the path
Of truth and honour with a steady heart!
But if I err in this; and if there be
Divinities whose will is cruel, unjust,

Capricious and supreme, I will forswear
The favour of these gods, and take my part
With man to suffer and for man to die.
Have ye not heard, my lords? The oracle
Proclaims to me, to me alone, the doom
Of vengeance if I lead the army out.
"Conquered or conquering!" I grip that chance!
Damascus free, her foes all beaten back,
The people saved from slavery, the King
Upheld in honour on his ancient throne,—
O what's the cost of this? I'll gladly pay
Whatever gods there be, whatever price
They ask for this one victory. Give me
This gilded sign of shame to carry back;
I'll shake it in the face of Asshur's king,
And break it on his teeth.

BENHADAD: [*Rising.*]

Then go, my never-beaten captain, go!

And may the powers that hear thy solemn vow
Forgive thy rashness for Damascus' sake,
Prosper thy fighting, and remit thy pledge.

Rezon: [*Standing beside the altar.*]
The pledge, O King, this man must seal his pledge
At Rimmon's altar. He must take the cup
Of soldier-sacrament, and bind himself
By thrice-performed libation to abide
The fate he has invoked.

Naaman: [*Slowly.*]
And so I will.

[*He comes down the steps, toward the altar, where* Rezon *is filling the cup which* Tsarpi *holds.* Ruahmah *throws herself before* Naaman, *clasping his knees.*]

Ruahmah: [*Passionately and wildly.*]
My lord, I do beseech you, stay! There's death
Within that cup. It is an offering
To devils. See, the wine blazes like fire,
It flows like blood, it is a cursed cup,

Fulfilled of treachery and hate.

Dear master, noble master, touch it not!

NAAMAN:

Poor maid, thy brain is still distraught. Fear not

But let me go! Here, treat her tenderly!

[*Gives her into the hands of* SABALLIDIN.]

Can harm befall me from the wife who bears

My name? I take the cup of fate from her.

I greet the unknown powers; [*Pours libation.*]

I will perform my vow; [*Again.*]

I will abide my fate; [*Again.*]

I pledge my life to keep Damascus free.

[*He drains the cup, and lets it fall.*]

CURTAIN.

ACT II

ACT II

TIME: *A week later*

The fore-court of the House of Rimmon. At the back the broad steps and double doors of the shrine: above them the tower of the god, its summit invisible. Enter various groups of citizens, talking, laughing, shouting: RAKHAZ, HAZAEL, SHUMAKIM *and others.*

FIRST CITIZEN:

Great news, glorious news, the Assyrians are beaten!

SECOND CITIZEN:

Naaman is returning, crowned with victory. Glory to our noble captain!

THIRD CITIZEN:

No, he is killed. I had it from one of the camp-followers who saw him fall at the head of the battle. They are bringing his body to bury it with honour. O sorrowful victory!

RAKHAZ:

Peace, my good fellows, you are ignorant, you have not been rightly informed, I will misinform you.

The accounts of Naaman's death are overdrawn. He was killed, but his life has been preserved. One of his wounds was mortal, but the other three were curable, and by these the physicians have saved him.

SHUMAKIM: [*Balancing himself before* RAKHAZ *in pretended admiration.*]

O wonderful! Most admirable logic! One mortal, and three curable, therefore he must recover as it were, by three to one. Rakhaz, do you know that you are a marvelous man?

RAKHAZ:

Yes, I know it, but I make no boast of my knowledge.

SHUMAKIM:

Too modest, for in knowing this you know what is unknown to any other in Damascus!

[*Enter, from the right,* SABALLIDIN *in armour: from the left,* TSARPI *with her attendants, among whom is* RUAHMAH.]

HAZAEL:

Here is Saballidin, we'll question him;

He was enflamed by Naaman's fiery words,

And rode with him to battle. Good, my lord,

We hail you as a herald of the fight

You helped to win. Give us authentic news

Of your great general! Is he safe and well?

When will he come? Or will he come at all?

[*All gather around him, listening eagerly.*]

SABALLIDIN:

He comes but now, returning from the field

Where he hath gained a crown of deathless fame!

Three times he led the charge; three times he fell

Wounded, and the Assyrians beat us back.

Yet every wound was but a spur to urge

His valour onward. In the last attack

He rode before us as the crested wave

That heads the flood; and lo, our enemies

Were broken like a dam of river-reeds,

Burst by the torrent, scattered, swept away!
But look! the Assyrian king in wavering flight
Is lodged like driftwood on a little hill,
Encircled by his guard, and stands at bay.
Then Naaman, followed hotly by a score
Of whirlwind riders, hammers through the hedge
Of spearmen, brandishing the golden yoke:
"Take back this gift," he cries; and shatters it
On Shalmaneser's helmet. So the fight
Dissolves in universal rout: the king,
His chariots and his horsemen melt away:
Our captain stands the master of the field,
And saviour of Damascus! Now he brings,
First to the king, report of this great triumph.

[*Shouts of joy and applause.*]

RUAHMAH: [*Coming close to* SABALLIDIN.]
But what of him who won it? Fares he well?
My mistress would receive some word of him.

SABALLIDIN:

Hath she not heard?

RUAHMAH:

But one brief message came:

A tablet saying, "We have fought and conquered,"

No word of his own person. Fares he well?

SABALLIDIN:

Alas, most ill! For he is like a man

Consumed by some strange sickness: wasted, wan,—

His eyes are dimmed so that scarce can see;

His ears are dulled; his fearless face is pale

As one who walks to meet a certain doom

Yet will not flinch. It is most pitiful,—

But you shall see.

RUAHMAH:

Yea, we shall see a man

Who took upon himself his country's burden, dared

To hazard all to save the poor and helpless;

A man who bears the wrath of evil powers

Unknown, and pays the hero's sacrifice.

[*Enter* Benhadad *with courtiers.*]

Benhadad:

Where is my faithful servant Naaman,

The captain of my host?

Saballidin:

My lord, he comes.

[*Trumpet sounds. Enter company of soldiers in armour. Then four soldiers bearing captured standards of Asshur.* Naaman *follows, very pale, armour dinted and stained; he is blind, and guides himself by cords from the standards on each side, but walks firmly. The doors of the temple open slightly, and* Rezon *appears at the top of the steps.* Naaman *lets the cords fall, and gropes his way for a few paces.*]

Naaman: [*Kneeling.*]

Where is my King?

Master, the bearer of thy sword returns.

The golden yoke thou gavest me I broke

On him who sent it. Asshur's Bull hath fled

Dehorned. The standards of his host are thine!

Damascus is all thine, at peace, and free!

Benhadad: [*Holding out his arms.*]
Thou art a mighty man of valour! Come,

And let me fold thy courage to my heart.

Rezon: [*Lifting his rod.*]
Forbear, O King! Stand back from him, all men!

By the great name of Rimmon I proclaim

This man a leper! On his brow I see

The death-white seal, the finger-print of doom!

That tiny spot will spread, eating his flesh,

Gnawing his fingers bone from bone, until

The impious heart that dared defy the gods

Dissolves in the slow death which now begins.

Unclean! unclean! Henceforward he is dead:

No human hand shall touch him, and no home

Of men shall give him shelter. He shall walk

Only with corpses of the selfsame death

Down the long path to a forgotten tomb.

Avoid, depart, I do adjure you all,

Leave him to god,—the leper Naaman!

[*All shrink back horrified.* Rezon *retires into the temple; the crowd melts away, wailing:* Tsarpi *is among the first to go, followed by her attendants, except* Ruahmah, *who crouches, with her face covered, not far from* Naaman.]

Benhadad: [*Lingering and turning back.*]
Alas, my son! O Naaman, my son!
Why did I let thee go? Thou art cast out
Irrevocably from the city's life
Which thou hast saved. Who can resist the gods?
I must obey the law, and touch thy hand
Never again. Yet none shall take from thee
Thy glorious title, captain of my host!
I will provide for thee, and thou shalt dwell
With guards of honour in a house of mine
Always. Damascus never shall forget
What thou hast done! O miserable words
Of crowned impotence! O mockery of power
Given to kings, who cannot even defend

Their dearest from the secret wrath of heaven!

Naaman, my son, my son! [*Exit.*]

NAAMAN: [*Slowly, passing his hand over his eyes, and looking up.*]

Am I alone

With thee, inexorable one, whose pride

Offended takes this horrible revenge?

I must submit my mortal flesh to thee,

Almighty, but I will not call thee god!

Yet thou hast found the way to wound my soul

Most deeply through the flesh; and I must find

The way to let my wounded soul escape!

[*Drawing his sword.*]

Come, my last friend, thou art more merciful

Than Rimmon. Why should I endure the doom

He sends me? Irretrievably cut off

From all dear intercourse of human love,

From all the tender touch of human hands,

From all brave comradeship with brother-men,

With eyes that see no faces through this dark,

With ears that hear all voices far away,

Why should I cling to misery, and grope

My long, long way from pain to pain, alone?

RUAHMAH: [*At his feet.*]

Nay, not alone, dear lord, for I am here;

And I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee!

NAAMAN:

What voice is that? The silence of my tomb

Is broken by a ray of music,—whose?

RUAHMAH: [*Rising.*]

The one who loves thee best in all the world.

NAAMAN:

Why that should be,—O dare I dream it true?

Tsarpi, my wife? Have I misjudged thy heart

As cold and proud? How nobly thou forgivest!

Thou com'st to hold me from the last disgrace,—

The coward's flight into the dark. Go back

Unstained, my sword! Life is endurable

While there is one alive on earth who loves us.

RUAHMAH:

My lord,—my lord,—O listen! You have erred,—

You do mistake me now,—this dream—

NAAMAN:

Ah, wake me not! For I can conquer death

Dreaming this dream. Let me at last believe,

Though gods are cruel, a woman can be kind.

Grant me but this! For see,—I ask so little,—

Only to know that thou art faithful,—

Only to lean upon the thought that thou,

My wife, art near me, though I touch thee not,—

O this will hold me up, though it be given

From pity more than love.

RUAHMAH: [*Trembling, and speaking slowly.*]

Not so, my lord!

My pity is a stream; my pride of thee

Is like the sea that doth engulf the stream;

My love for thee is like the sovran moon
That rules the sea. The tides that fill my soul
Flow unto thee and follow after thee;
And where thou goest I will go; and where
Thou diest I will die,—in the same hour.

[*She lays her hand on his arm. He draws back.*]

NAAMAN:

O touch me not! Thou shalt not share my doom.

RUAHMAH:

Entreat me not to go. I will obey
In all but this; but rob me not of this,—
The only boon that makes life worth the living,—
To walk beside thee day by day, and keep
Thy foot from stumbling; to prepare thy food
When thou art hungry, music for thy rest,
And cheerful words to comfort thy black hour;
And so to lead thee ever on, and on,
Through darkness, till we find the door of hope.

NAAMAN:

What word is that? The leper has no hope.

RUAHMAH:

Dear lord, the mark upon thy brow is yet
No broader than my little finger-nail.
Thy force is not abated, and thy step
Is firm. Wilt thou surrender to the enemy
Before thy strength is touched? Why, let me put
A drop of courage from my breast in thine.
There is a hope for thee. The captive maid
Of Israel who dwelt within thy house
Knew of a god very compassionate,
Long-suffering, slow to anger, one who heals
The sick, hath pity on the fatherless,
And saves the poor and him who has no helper.
His prophet dwells nigh to Samaria;
And I have heard that he hath brought the dead
To life again. We'll go to him. The King,

If I beseech him, will appoint a guard
Of thine own soldiers and Saballidin,
Thy friend, to convoy us upon our journey.
He'll give us royal letters to the king
Of Israel to make our welcome sure;
And we will take the open road, beneath
The open sky, to-morrow, and go on
Together till we find the door of hope.
Come, come with me!

[*She grasps his hand.*]

NAAMAN: [*Drawing back.*]
Thou must not touch me!

RUAHMAH: [*Unclasping her girdle and putting the end in hand.*]
Take my girdle, then!

NAAMAN: [*Kissing the clasp of the girdle.*]
I do begin to think there is a God,
Since love on earth can work such miracles!

CURTAIN.

ACT III

ACT III

TIME: *A month later: dawn*

SCENE I

NAAMAN'S *tent, on high ground among the mountains near Samaria: the city below. In the distance, a wide and splendid landscape.* SABALLIDIN *and soldiers on guard below the tent. Enter* RUAHMAH *in hunter's dress, with a lyre slung from her shoulder.*

RUAHMAH:

Peace and good health to you, Saballidin.

Good morrow to you all. How fares my lord?

SABALLIDIN:

The curtains of his tent are folded still:

They have not moved since we returned, last night,

And told him what befell us in the city.

RUAHMAH:

Told him! Why did you make report to him

And not to me? Am I not captain here,

Intrusted by the King's command with care

Of Naaman's life, until he is restored?

'Tis mine to know the first of good or ill
In this adventure: mine to shield his heart
From every arrow of adversity.
What have you told him? Speak!

SABALLIDIN:

Lady, we feared
To bring our news to you. For when the king
Of Israel had read our monarch's letter,
He rent his clothes, and cried, "Am I a god,
To kill and make alive, that I should heal
A leper? Ye have come with false pretence,
Damascus seeks a quarrel with me. Go!"
But when we told our lord, he closed his tent,
And there remains enfolded in his grief.
I trust he sleeps; 't were kind to let him sleep!
For now he doth forget his misery,
And all the burden of his hopeless woe
Is lifted from him by the gentle hand

Of slumber. Oh, to those bereft of hope
Sleep is the only blessing left,—the last
Asylum of the weary, the one sign
Of pity from impenetrable heaven.
Waking is strife: sleep is the truce of God!
Ah, lady, wake him not. The day will be
Full long for him to suffer, and for us
To turn our disappointed faces home
On the long road by which we must return.

RUAHMAH:

Return! Who gave you that command? Not I!
The King made me the leader of this quest,
And bound you all to follow me, because
He knew I never would return without
The thing for which he sent us. I'll go on
Day after day, unto the uttermost parts
Of earth, if need be, and beyond the gates
Of morning, till I find that which I seek,—

New life for Naaman. Are ye ashamed
To have a woman lead you? Then go back
And tell the King, "This huntress went too far
For us to follow: she pursues the trail
Of hope alone, refusing to forsake
The quarry: we grew weary of the chase;
And so we left her and retraced our steps,
Like faithless hounds, to sleep beside the fire."
Did Naaman forsake his soldiers thus
When you went forth to hunt the Assyrian Bull?
Your manly courage is less durable
Than woman's love, it seems. Go, if you will,—
Who bids me now farewell?

Soldiers:

Not I, not I!

Saballidin:

Lady, lead on, we'll follow you for ever!

Ruahmah:

Why, now you speak like men! Brought you no word

Out of Samaria, except that cry

Of impotence and fear from Israel's king?

SABALLIDIN:

I do remember while he spoke with us

A rustic messenger came in, and cried

"Elisha saith, let Naaman come to me

At Dothan, he shall surely know there is

A God in Israel."

RUAHMAH:

What said the King?

SABALLIDIN:

He only shouted "Go!" more wildly yet,

And rent his clothes again, as if he were

Half-maddened by a coward's fear, and thought

Only of how he might be rid of us.

What comfort could there be for him, what hope

For us, in the rude prophet's misty word?

RUAHMAH:

It is the very word for which I prayed!

My trust was not in princes; for the crown,
The sceptre, and the purple robe are not
Significant of vital power. The man
Who saves his brother-men is he who lives
His life with Nature, takes deep hold on truth,
And trusts in God. A prophet's word is more
Than all the kings on earth can speak. How far
Is Dothan?

Soldier:

Lady, 'tis but three hours' ride
Along the valley northward.

Ruahmah:

Near! so near?
I had not thought to end my task so soon!
Prepare yourselves with speed to take the road.
I will awake my lord.

[*Exeunt all but* Saballidin *and* Ruahmah. *She goes toward the tent.*]

Saballidin:

Ruahmah, stay! [*She turns back.*]

I've been your servant in this doubtful quest,

Obedient, faithful, loyal to your will,—

What have I earned by this?

RUAHMAH:

The gratitude

Of him we both desire to serve: your friend,—

My master and my lord.

SABALLIDIN:

No more than this?

RUAHMAH:

Yes, if you will, take all the thanks my hands

Can hold, my lips can speak.

SABALLIDIN:

I would have more.

RUAHMAH:

My friend, there's nothing more to give to you.

My service to my lord is absolute.

There's not a drop of blood within my veins

But quickens at the very thought of him;

And not a dream of mine but he doth stand

Within its heart and make it bright. No man

To me is other than his friend or foe.

You are his friend, and I believe you true!

SABALLIDIN:

I have been true to him,—now, I am true

To you.

RUAHMAH:

And therefore doubly true to him!

O let us match our loyalties, and strive

Between us who shall win the higher crown!

Men boast them of a friendship stronger far

Than love of woman. Prove it! I'll not boast,

But I'll contend with you on equal terms

In this brave race: and if you win the prize

I'll hold you next to him: and if I win

He'll hold you next to me; and either way

We'll not be far apart. Do you accept

My challenge?

SABALLIDIN:

Yes! For you enforce my heart
By honour to resign its great desire,
And love itself to offer sacrifice
Of all disloyal dreams on its own altar.
Yet love remains; therefore I pray you, think
How surely you must lose in our contention.
For I am known to Naaman: but you
He blindly takes for Tsarpi. 'Tis to her
He gives his gratitude: the praise you win
Endears her name.

RUAHMAH:

Her name? Why, what is that?
A name is but an empty shell, a mask
That does not change the features of the face
Beneath it. Can a name rejoice, or weep,
Or hope? Can it be moved by tenderness
To daily services of love, or feel the warmth
Of dear companionship? How many things

We call by names that have no meaning: kings
That cannot rule; and gods that are not good;
And wives that do not love! It matters not
What syllables he utters when he calls,
'Tis I who come,—'tis I who minister
Unto my lord, and mine the living heart
That feels the comfort of his confidence,
The thrill of gladness when he speaks to me,—
I do not hear the name!

Saballidin:

And yet, be sure
There's danger in this error,—and no gain!

Ruahmah:

I seek no gain: I only tread the path
Marked for me daily by the hand of love.
And if his blindness spared my lord one pang
Of sorrow in his black, forsaken hour,—
And if this error makes his burdened heart
More quiet, and his shadowed way less dark,

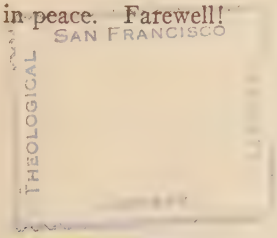
Whom do I rob? Not her who chose to stay
At ease in Rimmon's House! Surely not him!
Only myself! And that enriches me.
Why trouble we the master? Let it go,—
To-morrow he must know the truth,—and then
He shall dispose of me e'en as he will!

SABALLIDIN:

To-morrow?

RUAHMAH:

Yes, for I will tarry here,
While you conduct him to Elisha's house
To find the promised healing. I forebode
A sudden danger from the craven king
Of Israel, or else a secret ambush
From those who hate us in Damascus. Go,
But leave me twenty men: this mountain-pass
Protects the road behind you. Make my lord
Obey the prophet's word, whatever he commands,
And come again in peace. Farewell!



[*Exit* Saballidin. Ruahmah *goes toward the tent, then pauses and turns back. She takes her lyre and sings.*]

Song.

Above the edge of dark appear the lances of the sun;
Along the mountain-ridges clear his rosy heralds run;
The vapours down the valley go
Like broken armies, dark and low.
Look up, my heart, from every hill
In folds of rose and daffodil
The sunrise banners flow.

O fly away on silent wing, ye boding owls of night!
O welcome little birds that sing the coming-in of light!
For new, and new, and ever-new,
The golden bud within the blue;
And every morning seems to say:
"There's something happy on the way,
"And God sends love to you!"

NAAMAN: [*Appearing at the entrance of his tent.*]

O let me ever wake to music! For the soul

Returns most gently then, and finds its way

By the soft, winding clue of melody,

Out of the dusky labyrinth of sleep,

Into the light. My body feels the sun

Though I behold naught that his rays reveal.

Come, thou who art my daydawn and my sight,

Sweet eyes, come close, and make the sunrise mine!

RUAHMAH: [*Coming near.*]

A fairer day, dear lord, was never born

In Paradise! The sapphire cup of heaven

Is filled with golden wine: the earth, adorned

With jewel-drops of dew, unveils her face

A joyful bride, in welcome to her king.

And look! He leaps upon the Eastern hills

All ruddy fire, and claims her with a kiss.

Yonder the snowy peaks of Hermon float

Unmoving as a wind-dropt cloud. The gulf
Of Jordan, filled with violet haze, conceals
The river's winding trail with wreaths of mist.
Below us, marble-crowned Samaria thrones
Upon her emerald hill amid the Vale
Of Barley, while the plains to northward change
Their colour like the shimmering necks of doves.
The lark springs up, with morning on her wings,
To climb her singing stairway in the blue,
And all the fields are sprinkled with her joy!

NAAMAN:

Thy voice is magical: thy words are visions!
I must content myself with them, for now
My only hope is lost: Samaria's king
Rejects our monarch's message,—hast thou heard?
"Am I a god that I should cure a leper?"
He sends me home unhealed, with angry words,
Back to Damascus and the lingering death.

RUAHMAH:

What matter where he sends? No god is he

To slay or make alive. Elisha bids

You come to him at Dothan, there to learn

There is a God in Israel.

NAAMAN:

I fear

That I am grown mistrustful of all gods;

Their secret counsels are implacable.

RUAHMAH:

Fear not! There's One who rules in righteousness

High over all.

NAAMAN:

What knowest thou of Him?

RUAHMAH:

Oh, I have heard,—the maid of Israel,—

Rememberest thou? She often said her God

Was merciful and kind, and slow to wrath,

And plenteous in forgiveness, pitying us

Like as a father pitieth his children.

NAAMAN:

If there were such a God, I'd worship Him

For ever!

RUAHMAH:

Then make haste to hear the word

His prophet promises to speak to thee!

Obey it, my dear lord, and thou shalt lose

This curse that burdens thee. This tiny spot

Of white that mars the beauty of thy brow

Shall melt like snow; thine eyes be filled with light.

Thou wilt not need my leading any more,—

Nor me,—for thou wilt see me, all unveiled,—

I tremble at the thought.

NAAMAN:

Why, what is this?

Why shouldst thou tremble? Art thou not mine

own?

RUAHMAH: [*Turning to him.*]

Surely I am! But take me, take me now!

For I belong to thee in body and soul;

The very pulses of my heart are thine.

Wilt thou not feel how tenderly they beat?

Wilt thou not lie like myrrh between my breasts

And satisfy thy lonely lips with love?

Thou art opprest, and I would comfort thee

While yet thy sorrow weighs upon thy life.

To-morrow? No, to-day! The crown of love

Is sacrifice; I have not given thee

Enough! Ah, fold me in thine arms,—take all!

[*She takes his hands and puts them around her neck; he holds her from him, with one hand on her shoulder, the other behind her head.*]

NAAMAN:

Thou art too dear to injure with a kiss,—

Too dear for me to stain thy purity,

Or leave one touch upon thee to regret!

How should I take a gift may bankrupt thee,

Or drain the fragrant chalice of thy love

With lips that may be fatal? Tempt me not
To sweet dishonour; strengthen me to wait
Until thy prophecy is all fulfilled,
And I can claim thee with a joyful heart.

Ruahmah: [*Turning away.*]
Thou wilt not need me then,—and I shall be
No more than the faint echo of a song
Heard half asleep. We shall go back to where
We stood before this journey.

Naaman:
Never again!
For thou art changed by some deep miracle.
The flower of womanhood hath bloomed in thee,—
Art thou not changed?

Ruahmah:
Yea, I am changed,—and changed
Again,—bewildered,—till there's nothing clear
To me but this: I am the instrument
In an Almighty hand to rescue thee

From death. This will I do,—and afterward—

[*A trumpet is blown, without.*]

Hearken, the trumpet sounds, the chariot waits.

Away, dear lord, follow the road to light!

Scene II.*

The house of Elisha, upon a terraced hillside. A low stone cottage with vine-trellises and flowers; a flight of steps, at the foot of which is Naaman's *chariot. He is standing in it;* Saballidin *beside it. Two soldiers come down the steps.*

First Soldier:

We have delivered my lord's greeting and his message.

Second Soldier:

Yes, and near lost our noses in the doing of it!

For the servant slammed the door in our faces.

A most unmannerly reception!

*Note that this scene is not intended to be put upon the stage, the effect of the action upon the drama being given at the beginning of Act IV.

First Soldier:

But I take that as a good omen. It is mark of holy men to keep ill-conditioned servants. Look, the door opens, the prophet is coming.

Second Soldier:

No, by my head, it's that notable mark of his master's holiness, that same lantern-jawed lout of a servant.

[Gehazi *loiters down the steps and comes to* Naaman *with a slight obeisance.*]

Gehazi:

My master, the prophet of Israel, sends word to Naaman the Syrian,—are you he?—"Go wash in Jordan seven times and be healed."

[Gehazi *turns and goes slowly up the steps.*]

Naaman:

What insolence is this? Am I a man
To be put off with surly messengers?
Has not Damascus rivers more renowned

Than this rude, torrent Jordan? Crystal streams,

Abana! Pharpar! flowing smoothly through

A paradise of roses? Might I not

Have bathed in them and been restored at ease?

Come up, Saballidin, and guide me home!

SABALLIDIN:

Bethink thee, master, shall we lose our quest

Because a servant is uncouth? The road

That seeks the mountain leads us through the vale.

The prophet's word is friendly after all;

For had it been some mighty task he set,

Thou wouldst perform it. How much rather then

This easy one? Hast thou not promised her

Who waits for thy return? Wilt thou go back

To her unhealed?

NAAMAN:

No! not for all my pride!

I'll make myself most humble for her sake,

And stoop to anything that gives me hope

Of having her. Make haste, Saballidin,

Bring me to Jordan. I will cast myself

Into that river's turbulent embrace

A hundred times, until I save my life

Or lose it!

[*Exeunt. The light fades: musical interlude. The light increases again with ruddy sunset shining on the the door of* Elisha's *house. The prophet appears and looks off, shading his eyes with his hand as he descends the steps slowly. Trumpet blows,*—Naaman's *call;—sound of horses galloping and men shouting.* Naaman *enters joyously, followed by* Saballidin *and soldiers, with gifts.*]

Naaman:

Behold a man delivered from the grave

By thee! I rose from Jordan's waves restored

To youth and vigour, as the eagle mounts

Upon the sunbeam and renews his strength!

O mighty prophet deign to take from me

These gifts too poor to speak my gratitude;

Silver and gold and jewels, damask robes,—

Elisha: [*Interrupting.*]

As thy soul liveth I will not receive

A gift from thee, my son! Give all to Him

Whose mercy hath redeemed thee from thy plague.

Naaman:

He is the only God! I worship Him!

Grant me a portion of the blessed soil

Of this most favoured land where I have found

His mercy; in Damascus will I build

An altar to His name, and praise Him there

Morning and night. There is no other God

In all the world.

Elisha:

Thou needest not

This load of earth to build a shrine for Him;

Yet take it if thou wilt. But be assured

God's altar is in every loyal heart,

And every flame of love that kindles there
Ascends to Him and brightens with His praise.
There is no other God! But evil Powers
Make war against Him in the darkened world;
And many temples have been built to them.

Naaman:

I know them well! Yet when my master goes
To worship in the House of Rimmon, I
Must enter with him; for he trusts me, leans
Upon my hand; and when he bows himself
I cannot help but make obeisance too,—
But not to Rimmon! To my country's king
I'll bow in love and honour. Will the Lord
Pardon thy servant in this thing?

Elisha:

My son,
Peace has been granted thee. 'Tis thine to find
The only way to keep it. Go in peace.

NAAMAN:

Thou hast not answered me,—may I bow down?

ELISHA:

The answer must be thine. The heart that knows

The perfect peace of gratitude and love,

Walks in the light and needs no other rule.

Take counsel with thy heart and go in peace!

CURTAIN.

ACT IV

ACT IV

Scene I

The interior of Naaman's *tent, at night.* Ruahmah *alone, sleeping on the ground. A vision appears to her through the curtains of the tent:* Elisha *standing on the hillside at Dothan:* Naaman, *restored to sight, comes in and kneels before him.* Elisha *blesses him, and he goes out rejoicing. The vision of the prophet turns to* Ruahmah *and lifts his hand in warning.*

Elisha:

Daughter of Israel, what dost thou here?

Thy prayer is granted. Naaman is healed:

Mar not true service with a selfish thought.

Nothing remains for thee to do, except

Give thanks, and go whither the Lord commands.

Obey,—obey! Ere Naaman returns

Thou must depart to thine own house in Shechem.

[*The vision vanishes.*]

Ruahmah: [*Waking and rising slowly.*]

A dream, a dream, a messenger of God!

O dear and dreadful vision, art thou true?

Then am I glad with all my broken heart.

Nothing remains,—nothing remains but this,—

Give thanks, obey, depart,—and so I do.

Farewell, my master's sword! Farewell to you,

My amulet! I lay you on the hilt

His hand shall clasp again: bid him farewell

For me, since I must look upon his face

No more for ever!—Hark, what sound was that?

[*Enter soldier hurriedly.*]

SOLDIER:

Mistress, an armèd troop, footmen and horse,

Mounting the hill!

RUAHMAH:

My lord returns in triumph.

SOLDIER:

Not so, for these are enemies; they march

In haste and silence, answering not our cries.

RUAHMAH:

Our enemies? Then hold your ground,—on guard!

Fight! fight! Defend the pass, and drive them down.

[*Exit soldier.* Ruahmah *draws* Naaman's *sword from the scabbard and hurries out of the tent. Confused noise of fighting outside. Three or four soldiers are driven in by a troop of men in disguise.* Ruahmah *follows: she is beaten to her knees, and her sword is broken.*]

Rezon: [*Throwing aside the cloth which covers his face.*]

Hold her! So, tiger-maid, we've found your lair

And trapped you. Where is Naaman,

Your master?

Ruahmah: [*Rising, her arms held by two of* Rezon's *followers.*]

He is far beyond your reach.

Rezon:

Brave captain! He has saved himself, the leper,

And left you here?

Ruahmah:

The leper is no more.

Rezon:

What mean you?

Ruahmah:

He has gone to meet his God.

Rezon:

Dead? Dead? Behold how Rimmon's wrath is swift!

Damascus shall be mine: I'll terrify

The King with this, and make my terms. But no!

False maid, you sweet-faced harlot, you have lied

To save him,—speak.

Ruahmah:

I am not what you say,

Nor have I lied, nor will I ever speak

A word to you, vile servant of a traitor-god.

Rezon:

Break off this little flute of blasphemy,

This ivory neck,—twist it, I say!

Give her a swift despatch after her leper!

But stay,—if he still lives he'll follow her,

And so we may ensnare him. Harm her not!

Bind her! Away with her to Rimmon's House!

Is all this carrion dead? There's one that moves,—

A spear,—fasten him down! All quiet now?

Then back to our Damascus! Rimmon's face

Shall be made bright with sacrifice.

[*Exeunt, forcing* RUAHMAH *with them. Musical interlude. A wounded soldier crawls from a dark corner of the tent and finds the chain with* NAAMAN'S *seal, which has fallen to the ground in the struggle.*]

WOUNDED SOLDIER:

This signet of my lord, her amulet!

Lost, lost! Ah, noble lady,—let me die

With this upon my breast.

[*The tent is dark. Enter* NAAMAN *and his company in haste, with torches.*]

NAAMAN:

What bloody work

Is here? God, let me live to punish him

Who wrought this horror! Treacherously slain

At night, by unknown hands, my brave companions:

Tsarpi, my best beloved, light of my soul,

Put out in darkness! O my broken lamp

Of life, where art thou? Nay, I cannot find her.

Wounded Soldier: [*Raising himself on his arm.*]
Master!

Naaman: [*Kneels beside him.*]
One living? Quick, a torch this way!

Lift up his head,—so,—carefully!

Courage, my friend, your captain is beside you.

Call back your soul and make report to him.

Wounded Soldier:
Hail, captain! O my captain,—here!

Naaman:
Be patient,—rest in peace,—the fight is done.

Nothing remains but render your account.

Wounded Soldier:
They fell upon us suddenly,—we fought

Our fiercest,—every man,—our lady fought

Fiercer than all. They beat us down,—she's gone.

Rezon has carried her away a captive. See,—

Her amulet,—I die for you, my captain.

NAAMAN: [*He gently lays the dead soldier on the ground, and rises.*]

Farewell. This last report was brave; but strange

Beyond my thought! How came the High Priest here?

And what is this? my chain, my seal! But this

Has never been in Tsarpi's hand. I gave

This signet to a captive maid one night,—

A maid of Israel. How long ago?

Ruahmah was her name,—almost forgotten!

So long ago,—how comes this token here?

What is this mystery, Saballidin?

SABALLIDIN:

Ruahmah is her name who brought you hither.

NAAMAN:

Where then is Tsarpi?

SABALLIDIN:

In Damascus.

She left you when the curse of Rimmon fell,—

Took refuge in his House,—and there she waits

Her lord's return,—Rezon's return.

NAAMAN:

'Tis false!

SABALLIDIN:

The falsehood is in her. She hath been friend

With Rezon in his priestly plot to win

Assyria's favour,—friend to his design

To sell his country to enrich his temple,—

And friend to him in more,—I will not name it.

NAAMAN:

Nor will I credit it. Impossible!

SABALLIDIN:

Did she not plead with you against the war,

Counsel surrender, seek to break your will?

NAAMAN:

She did not love my work, a soldier's task.

She never seemed to be at one with me

Until I was a leper.

SABALLIDIN:

From whose hand

Did you receive the sacred cup?

NAAMAN:

From hers.

SABALLIDIN:

And from that hour the curse began to work.

NAAMAN:

But did she not have pity when she saw

Me smitten? Did she not beseech the King

For letters and a guard to make this journey?

Has she not been the fountain of my hope,

My comforter and my most faithful guide

In this adventure of the dark? All this

Is proof of perfect love that would have shared

A leper's doom rather than give me up.

Can I doubt her who dared to love like this?

SABALLIDIN:

O master, doubt her not,—but know her name;
Ruahmah! It was she alone who wrought
This wondrous work of love. She won the King
By the strong pleading of resistless hope
To furnish forth this company. She led
Our march, kept us in heart, fought off despair,
Offered herself to you as to her god,
Watched over you as if you were her child,
Prepared your food, your cup, with her own hands,
Sang you asleep at night, awake at dawn,—

NAAMAN: [*Interrupting.*]

Enough! I do remember every hour
Of that sweet comradeship! And now her voice
Wakens the echoes in my lonely breast;
The perfume of her presence fills my sense
With longing. All my soul cries out in vain
For her embracing, satisfying love,

That I may rest in her and be at peace.

Shall I not see her, thank her, speak her name?

Ruahmah! Let me live till I have looked

Into her eyes and called her my Ruahmah!

[To his soldiers.]

Away! away! I burn to take the road

That leads me back to Rimmon's House,—

But not to bow,—by God, never to bow!

TIME: *Three days later*

SCENE II

Inner court of the House of Rimmon; a temple with huge pillars at each side. In the right foreground the seat of the King; at the left, of equal height, the seat of the High Priest. In the background a broad flight of steps, rising to a curtain of cloudy gray, embroidered with two gigantic hands holding thunderbolts. The temple is in half darkness at first. Enter KHAMMA *and* NUBTA, *robed as Kharimati, or religious dancers, in gowns of black gauze with yellow embroideries and mantles.*

KHAMMA:

All is ready for the rites of worship; our lady will

play a great part in them. She has put on her Tyrian robes, and all her ornaments.

NUBTA:

That is a sure sign of a religious purpose. She is most devout, our lady Tsarpi!

KHAMMA:

A favourite of Rimmon, too! The High Priest has assured her of it. He is a great man,—next to the King, now that Naaman is gone.

NUBTA:

But if Naaman should come back, healed of the leprosy?

KHAMMA:

How can he come back? The Hebrew slave that went away with him, when they caught her, said that he was dead. The High Priest has shut her up in the prison of the temple, accusing her of her master's death.

NUBTA:

Yet I think he does not believe it, for I heard him

telling our mistress what to do if Naaman should return.

KHAMMA:

What, then?

NUBTA:

She will claim him as her husband. Was she not wedded to him before the god? That is a sacred bond. Only the High Priest can loose it. She will keep her hold on Naaman for the sake of the House of Rimmon. A wife knows her husband's secrets, she can tell——

[*Enter* SHUMAKIM, *with his flagon, walking unsteadily.*]

KHAMMA:

Hush! here comes the fool Shumakim. He is never sober.

SHUMAKIM: [*Laughing.*]

Are there two of you? I see two, but that is no proof. I think there is only one, but beautiful

enough for two. What were you talking to yourself about, fairest one!

KHAMMA:

About the lady Tsarpi, fool, and what she would do if her husband returned.

SHUMAKIM:

Fie! fie! That is no talk for an innocent fool to hear. Has she a husband?

NUBTA:

You know very well that she is the wife of Lord Naaman.

SHUMAKIM:

I remember that she used to wear his name and his jewels. But I thought he had exchanged her,—for a leprosy.

KHAMMA:

You must have heard that he went away to Samaria to look for healing. Some say that he died on the journey; but others say he has been cured, and is on his way home to his wife.

SHUMAKIM:

It may be, for this is a mad world, and men never know when they are well off,—except us fools. But he must come soon if he would find his wife as he parted from her,—or the city where he left it. The Assyrians have returned with a greater army, and this time they will make an end of us. There is no Naaman now, and the Bull will devour Damascus like a bunch of leeks, flowers and all,—flowers and all, my double-budded fair one! Are you not afraid?

NUBTA:

We belong to the House of Rimmon. He will protect us.

SHUMAKIM:

What? The mighty one who hides behind the curtain there, and tells his secrets to Rezon? No doubt he will take care of you, and of himself. Whatever game is played, the gods never lose.

But for the protection of the common people and the rest of us fools, I would rather have Naaman at the head of an army than all the sacred images between here and Babylon.

KHAMMA:

You are a wicked old man. You mock the god. He will punish you.

SHUMAKIM: [*Bitterly.*]

How can he punish me? Has he not already made me a fool? Hark, here comes my brother the High Priest, and my brother the King. Rimmon made us all; but nobody knows who made Rimmon, except the High Priest; and he will never tell.

[*Gongs and cymbals sound. Enter* REZON *with priests, and the King with courtiers. They take their seats. A throng of Khali and Kharimati come in,* TSARPI *presiding; a sacred dance is performed with torches, burning incense, and chanting, in which* TSARPI *leads.*]

CHANT.

Hail, mighty Rimmon, ruler of the whirl-storm,

Hail, shaker of mountains, breaker-down of forests,

Hail, thou who roarest terribly in the darkness,

Hail, thou whose arrows flame across the heavens!

Hail, great destroyer, lord of flood and tempest,

In thine anger almighty, in thy wrath eternal,

Thou who delightest in ruin, maker of desolations,

Immeru, Addu, Barku, Rimmon!

See we tremble before thee, low we bow at thine altar,

Have mercy upon us, be favourable unto us,

Save us from our enemy, accept our sacrifice,

Barku, Immeru, Addu, Rimmon!

[*Silence follows, all bowing down.*]

REZON:

O King, last night the counsel from above

Was given in answer to our divination.

Ambassadors must go forthwith to crave

Assyria's pardon, and a second offer
Of the same terms of peace we did reject
Not long ago.

BENHADAD:

Dishonour! Yet I see
No other way! Assyria will refuse,
Or make still harder terms. Disaster, shame
For this gray head, and ruin for Damascus!

REZON:

Yet may we trust Rimmon will favour us,
If we adhere devoutly to his worship.
He will incline his brother-god, the Bull,
To spare us, if we supplicate him now
With costly gifts. Therefore I have prepared
A sacrifice: Rimmon shall be well pleased
With the red blood that bathes his knees to-night!

BENHADAD:

My mind is dark with doubt,—I do forebode
Some horror! Let me go,—I am an old man,—

If Naaman my captain were alive!

But he is dead,—the glory is departed!

[*He rises, trembling, to leave the throne. Trumpet sounds,*—Naaman's *call;*—*enter* Naaman, *followed by soldiers; he kneels at the foot of the throne.*]

Benhadad: [*Half-whispering.*]

Art thou a ghost escaped from Allatu?

How didst thou pass the seven doors of death?

O noble ghost I am afraid of thee,

And yet I love thee,—let me hear thy voice!

Naaman:

No ghost, my King, but one who lives to serve

Thee and Damascus with his heart and sword

As in the former days. The only God

Has healed my leprosy: my life is clean

To offer to my country and my King.

Benhadad: [*Starting toward him.*]

O welcome to thy King! Thrice welcome!

REZON: [*Leaving his seat and coming toward* NAAMAN.]
Stay!

The leper must appear before the priest,

The only one who can pronounce him clean.

[NAAMAN *turns; they stand looking each other in the face.*]

Yea,—thou art cleansed: Rimmon hath pardoned thee,—

In answer to the daily prayers of her

Whom he restores to thine embrace,—thy wife.

[TSARPI *comes slowly toward* NAAMAN.]

NAAMAN:
From him who rules this House will I receive

Nothing! I seek no pardon from his priest,

No wife of mine among his votaries!

TSARPI: [*Holding out her hands.*]
Am I not yours? Will you renounce our vows?

NAAMAN:
The vows were empty,—never made you mine

In aught but name. A wife is one who shares

Her husband's thought, incorporates his heart
With hers by love, and crowns him with her trust.
She is God's remedy for loneliness,
And God's reward for all the toil of life.
This you have never been to me,—and so
I give you back again to Rimmon's House
Where you belong. Claim what you will of mine,—
Not me! I do renounce you,—or release you,—
According to the law. If you demand
A further cause than what I have declared,
I will unfold it fully to the King.

Rezon: [*Interposing hurriedly.*]
No need of that! This duteous lady yields
To your caprice as she has ever done:
She stands a monument of loyalty
And woman's meekness.

Naaman:
Let her stand for that!

Adorn your temple with her piety!

But you in turn restore to me the treasure

You stole at midnight from my tent.

REZON:

What treasure? I have stolen none from you.

NAAMAN:

The very jewel of my soul,—Ruahmah!

My King, the captive maid of Israel,

To whom thou didst commit my broken life

With letters to Samaria,—my light,

My guide, my saviour in this pilgrimage,—

Dost thou remember?

BENHADAD:

I recall the maid,—

But dimly,—for my mind is old and weary.

She was a fearless maid, I trusted her

And gave thee to her charge. Where is she now?

NAAMAN:

This robber fell upon my camp by night,—

While I was with Elisha at the Jordan,—
Slaughtered my soldiers, carried off the maid,
And holds her somewhere in imprisonment.
O give this jewel back to me, my King,
And I will serve thee with a grateful heart
For ever. I will fight for thee, and lead
Thine armies on to glorious victory
Over all foes! Thou shalt no longer fear
The host of Asshur, for thy throne shall stand
Encompassed with a wall of dauntless hearts,
And founded on a mighty people's love,
And guarded by the God of righteousness.

BENHADAD:

I feel the flame of courage at thy breath
Leap up among the ashes of despair.
Thou hast returned to save us! Thou shalt have
The maid; and thou shalt lead my host again!
Priest, I command you give her back to him.

REZON:

O master, I obey thy word as thou

Hast ever been obedient to the voice

Of Rimmon. Let thy fiery captain wait

Until the sacrifice has been performed,

And he shall have the jewel that he claims.

Must we not first placate the city's god

With due allegiance, keep the ancient faith,

And pay our homage to the Lord of Wrath?

BENHADAD: [*Sinking back upon his throne in fear.*]

I am the faithful son of Rimmon's House,—

And lo, these many years I worship him!

My thoughts are troubled,—I am very old,

But still a King! O Naaman, be patient!

Priest, let the sacrifice be offered.

[*The High Priest lifts his rod. Gongs and cymbals sound. The curtain is rolled back, disclosing the image of Rimmon; a gigantic and hideous idol, with a cruel human face, four*

horns, the mane of a lion, and huge paws stretched in front of him enclosing a low altar of black stone. Ruahmah *stands on the altar, chained, her arms are bare and folded on her breast. The people prostrate themselves in silence, with signs of astonishment and horror.*]

Rezon:

Behold the sacrifice! Bow down, bow down!

Naaman: [*Stabbing him.*]

Bow thou, black priest! Down,—down to hell!

Ruahmah! do not die! I come to thee.

[Naaman *rushes toward her, attacked by the priests, crying "Sacrilege! Kill him!" But the soldiers stand on the steps and beat them back. He springs upon the altar and clasps her by the hand. Tumult and confusion. The King rises and speaks with a loud voice, silence follows.*]

Benhadad:

Peace, peace! The King commands all weapons down!

O Naaman, what wouldst thou do? Beware

Lest thou provoke the anger of a god.

NAAMAN:

There is no God but one, the Merciful,

Who gave this perfect woman to my soul

That I might learn through her to worship Him,

And know the meaning of immortal Love.

Whom God hath joined together, all the Powers

Of hate and falsehood never shall divide.

BENHADAD: [*Agitated.*

Yet she is consecrated, bound, and doomed

To sacrificial death; but thou art sworn

To live and lead my host,—Hast thou not sworn?

NAAMAN:

Only if thou wilt keep thy word to me!

Break with this idol of iniquity

Whose shadow makes a darkness in the land;

Give her to me who gave me back to thee;

And I will lead thine army to renown

And plant thy banners on the hill of triumph.

But if she dies, I die with her, defying Rimmon.

[*Cries of "Spare them! Release her! Give us back our Captain!" and "Sacrilege! Let them die!" Then silence, all turning toward the King.*]

BENHADAD:

Is this the choice? Must we destroy the bond

Of ancient faith, or slay the city's living hope!

I am an old, old man,—and yet the King!

Must I decide?—O let me ponder it!

[*His head sinks upon his breast. All stand eagerly looking at him.*]

NAAMAN: [*Holding her in his arms.*]

Ruahmah, my Ruahmah! I have come

To thee at last! And art thou satisfied?

RUAHMAH: [*Looking into his face.*]

Belovéd, my belovéd, I am glad

Forever! Come what may, the only God

Is Love,—and He will never part us.

FINIS.

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